

# Adult Education Program

## How to write an essay



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## How to write an Essay

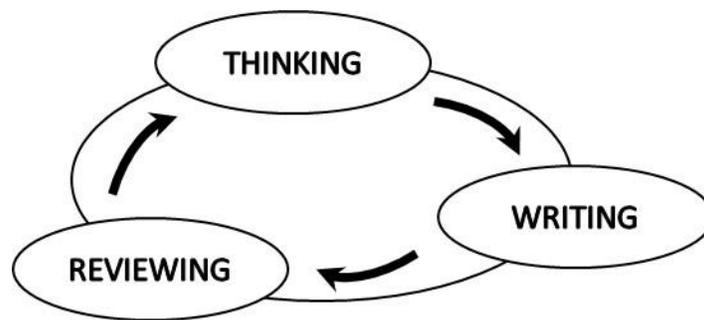
Question: How do you define good writing skills and tendencies?  
 Answer: Write using fewer words with the most meaning.

If every comma is perfectly placed, if every verb tense is correctly chosen, if every paragraph is effectively divided, will that be enough to make the writing good?

Not necessarily.

Knowing the **form** that writing should follow is certainly helpful. However, writing involves **content** as well as form. Your opinions, explanations, stories, and observations provide the content for your writing. Developing writing that is meaningful to read involves some careful thought, but the way you think differs from the way you need to write. You may think with pictures, images, fragmented sentences, or even feelings. Thus, it takes some work to transform thoughts and ideas into written communication that will be understood by someone else. Writing consists not only of a **product** but also a **process** by which that product is created.

### The Writing Process



#### EXERCISE 1

#### Making a List

**Directions:** Choose one of the options below and make a list. Remember to think about what should be on your list. After writing the list, review it to see whether you have forgotten anything or wish to change anything.

- (1) List of Things to Do for the week
- (2) List of your goals for the next year
- (3) List of the features you really want on your next car
- (4) List of what you have learned so far for the EIPCS Final Exam and what you still have questions about

Answers will vary.

#### TOPIC, PURPOSE, AND AUDIENCE

The first stage of the writing process is thinking. As you begin thinking and before you start to write, you need to consider the **topic**, **purpose**, and **audience** for your writing.

The **topic** is the subject of your writing—what you are writing about. If you write a letter to a landlord, the topic may be high rent or faulty air conditioning. If you write an essay about stress on individuals today, the topic may be causes of stress on individuals today or ways to cope with stress today.

Once you have a topic, you need to identify your **purpose**. Why are you writing? What point do you wish to make? Are you writing to tell a story, to voice a complaint, to describe an accident, or to persuade an employer to hire you? When you have determined your purpose, you can consider the best strategies for achieving that purpose.

To best achieve your purpose, you also need to consider the **audience**—who will be reading what you write. Sometimes you're writing for a private audience, perhaps in a journal intended for your eyes alone. More often, however, you are writing to communicate with other people. It's useful to decide whether the writing is aimed at a general group of people or a specific group or person. Just think about the difference in the way you would summarize your life experiences to a potential employer compared to the way you would explain them to your best friend.

In the Language Arts Writing section of the Final Test, you will be writing an essay on a topic that has been already selected for you. Although you do not have a choice of topics, you will have some choice regarding the approach to the topic. You will also need to determine the purpose of your writing. In an essay, you are stating your opinion, but what about it? Do you wish to inform others about something, entertain them with your wit, and persuade them to make a change, or just complain about a situation? Usually on an essay test such as the EIPCS Final Exam, you should assume that your audience is general readership.

**EXERCISE 2**

**Practice with Topic, Purpose, and Audience**

**Directions:** Write a short letter on one of the four choices given.

Topic	Purpose	Audience
1. An issue you feel government should address	You want a change.	A government leader
2. A kind act by someone who helped you	You want to express your thanks	A friend or family member
3. The qualities you really like in someone	You wish to express your admiration	A famous write, athlete, star, or leader
4. A problem or inconvenience you've encountered	You would like a refund or restitution	Customer service department of a company

Answers will vary.

**STAGE ONE: THINKING AND GENERATING IDEAS FOR WRITING**

Identifying the topic, purpose, and audience is a good way to begin, but you still need to spend some time thinking about what you will write. As you are thinking about the possibilities, you will find it helpful to make notes.

Writing down ideas as you are thinking is called **brainstorming**. Brainstorming is especially valuable for two main reasons. First of all, by writing down ideas as they come to you, you will reduce the possibility of forgetting them. As adults, we have a lot of things on our mind: family issues, work responsibilities, car problems, and many more. It's easy to forget when there is so much competition for attention. For example, what was the last sentence on the previous page? Only a few minutes ago you saw it, read, it, and understood it, yet you probably cannot recall it unless you turn back to look. Writing down your ideas as you think of them helps prevent their being lost.

Second, when you have brainstormed and written down some ideas, you can easily organize them. Once you have developed a list of ideas, you can select those that seem best, and you can organize them to provide a basic framework from which you can develop your writing.

**Seven Steps for Highly Effective Brainstorming**

- Step 1: Adopt an attitude. Give yourself permission to be silly, stupid, obvious. Don't judge yourself.
- Step 2: Consider the topic carefully.
- Step 3: List some ideas on the topic.
- Step 4: Make choices.
- Step 5: Develop associations.
- Step 6: Use the five W's (who, what, where, when, why) and organize.
- Step 7: Write a main idea sentence.

Now let's apply these steps to a sample topic.

TOPIC: A PLACE I'LL NEVER FORGET

Step 1: **Adopt an attitude.** Give yourself permission to put down any idea that comes to mind without worrying about whether it is silly, stupid, or obvious. You can help prevent writer's block by turning off the voice in your head that criticizes your ideas before you have even written them down. Remember that some of the greatest and most creative inventions have sprung from ideas that were originally labeled ridiculous.

**Example:** OK, I've got it! As Shakespeare said: The readiness is all! I'm ready to try Step 2.

Step 2: **Consider the topic carefully.** Be sure you understand what you should write about. If the topic is not in question form, turn it into a question that you can address.

**Example:** What is a place I'll never forget? Why does this place hold such a strong memory for me? What would I like my readers to understand about this place?

Step 3: **List some ideas on the topic.**

**Example:**

**Kauai**

wonderful—I'd write to make readers wish they could go there

**Lake in the Woods**

miserable—I'd write to make readers hope they **never** go there

**My Backyard**

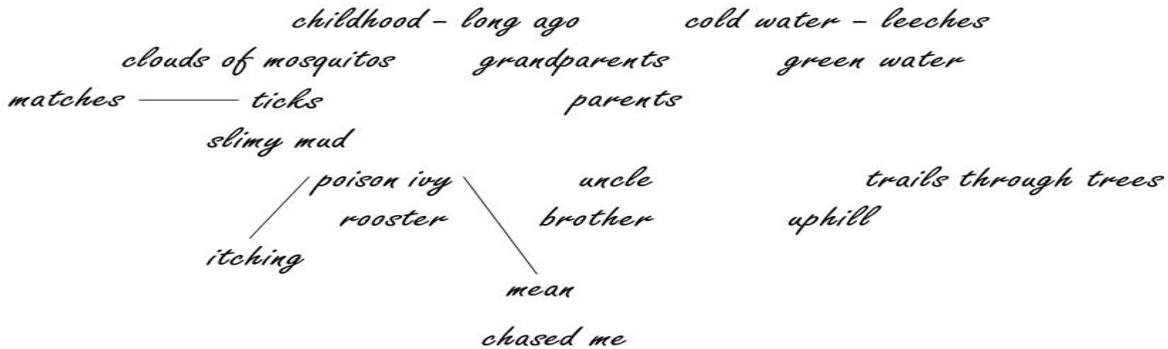
special—I'd write to share my memories and evoke the reader's sense of home

Step 4: **Make choices.** Select one idea to develop.

**Example:** the lake in the woods

Step 5: **Develop associations.** Write down any words or phrases that come into your mind as you are thinking.

**Example:** The Lake in the Woods



Step 6: **Use the five W's and organize.** Use the five question words, who, what, where, when, and why to make questions appropriate to the topic; then answer them.

**Example:** The Lake in the Woods

**Who** was there?  
grandparents  
parents  
uncle  
brother

**What** happened?  
**What** was true?  
biting insects  
nasty plants  
frightening leeches

**Where** was the place?  
in the country  
rural area  
north woods  
lake retreat

**When** did this happen?  
15 years ago  
in childhood  
one week visit

**Why** will I never forget?  
made me very miserable  
made me itch and ache  
made me distrustful of woods

Step 7: **Write a main idea sentence.** In a paragraph, the sentence that states the main idea is called the topic sentence (English I – Writing I) A topic sentence should contain a topic and a controlling idea.

**Example:** A place I will never forget is the lake in the woods where one long week of misery created a memory that has lasted more than 15 years.

**EXERCISE 3**

**Brainstorming Practice**

**Directions:** Select one of the topics below. Develop the topic by applying the seven steps for brainstorming. Keep your notes. You will need them to do Exercise 4.

1. A place I'll never forget
2. A person I'll never forget
3. An object that has meaning for me
4. An ideal vacation
5. An embarrassing experience

Answers will vary.

**STAGE TWO: WRITING A DRAFT**

Once you've done some thinking, you'll be ready to write a **draft**. This is a first version of writing that you will change later.

As you are writing, which of the following should you do?

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Pause to think carefully about the rules for commas, apostrophes, and grammar so that everything is correct. | Yes | No |
| 2. Stop often to check your spelling.   | Yes | No |
| 3. Start over every time you make a mistake.  | Yes | No |
| 4. Focus on transforming your notes and thoughts into developed, extended written form.                         | Yes | No |

The only statement that you should have answered *yes* to is number four, the last one. The most important thing to do when writing a draft is to focus on putting your ideas into written form. Use the ideas that you have generated during brainstorming to help keep the writing on track. Don't interrupt the flow of writing to agonize over corrections. If you're aware that something isn't quite right, *underline* the text in question. You can make changes and improvements later.

**EXERCISE 4**

**Writing a Draft**

**Directions:** Use your notes on the topic you chose for Exercise 3. Write a draft on the ideas you have developed. Save the draft to use in Exercise 5.

**REVIEWING AND EDITING: STAGE THREE**

The third stage of the writing process involves reviewing what you've written. It's a good idea to review your writing at least twice. At the first reading, consider the content you have written. Are all the ideas you wanted to include actually there? Use the checklist below to help you with any major editing.

**Checklist for Revision**

1. Is there a sentence that clearly states the main idea?
2. Does the rest of the writing support the main idea?
3. Are enough details and examples included?
4. Has the writing been organized effectively? Should any sentences be moved or removed?
5. Does the writing appear unified and coherent? How smooth is the transition between sentences and paragraphs?
6. Does the writing have a satisfactory conclusion?

After you have reviewed your text and made one set of revisions, read it again. In this second reading you can concentrate on proofing the writing for mechanical, usage, and structural errors. This is the time to think back to the usage rules and practices you have learned.

**Proofreading Checklist**

1. Does the sentence structure need editing? Are there any fragments or run-ons? Is there any problem in parallelism or modification?
2. Is the grammar correct? Check verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and pronoun use.
3. Are there any spelling, punctuation, or capitalization errors to be corrected?
4. Is the vocabulary effective and appropriate? Has the same word been used too many times?
5. Does the writing all make sense?

**EXERCISE 5**

**Reviewing and Editing a Draft**

**Directions:** Read the draft you wrote for Exercise 4. Review and edit the draft, using the checklists given above.

*TYPES OF WRITING*

Depending on your purpose and your topic, you may use a particular type of writing or a combination of different types. These are the four most commonly used types of writing:

<b>Type of Writing</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Narrative	tell a story or experience
Descriptive	create a picture or show something
Informative	instructor explain facts
Persuasive	influence or convince the reader to agree

Whatever type of writing you use, it will still need to be organized and unified. Remember to organize your writing into paragraphs that contain topic sentences that give the main idea. You also need supporting sentences that develop those main ideas. To review paragraph organization, see English I – Writing I.

**EXERCISE 6**

**Types of Writing**

**Directions:** Read the start of the story below. What two types of writing can you find?

Everything happened so quickly that now it's almost a blur in my mind. I will tell you, to the best of my abilities, what happened on those fateful days, when King Tutankhamen, still alive and unaware he was destined to die, paid a visit to the House of Life, where I worked as an apprentice scribe.

It was a boiling hot day. Egypt's blazing sun beat down upon the broiling earth without mercy. Even the shade of the palm trees couldn't provide relief from the scorching heat. All was quiet, except for the cries and shouts of the poor boys, happily playing in the cool waters of the Nile. I paused for a moment, stopping my writing in mid-sentence, to gaze longingly at the cheerful sight in the river. That's why I didn't notice . . .

*Selection used with permission of Elizabeth Nelson*

*NARRATIVE WRITING*

The purpose of **narrative writing** is to tell a story or relate an experience. Very often, the writing is organized by time order. For this reason the sequencing of events, as well as the verb tenses, is very important. Read the following paragraph. What problem has occurred in the writing?

The clock outside the depot told him he was late before he even entered the station. As he rushed over to the window to buy a ticket, he saw the train pulling in. He reached into his jacket pocket to take out his wallet. To his great dismay, the pocket was empty. At once he remembers the man bumping into him on the crowded street. He curses inwardly. Then he heard the whistle of the train.

The problem is that the verb tense is not consistent with the time order of the story. Most stories are told in the past tense. This story begins in the past tense, but the writer slips into the present tense with the verbs *remembers* and *curses*. Those verbs should have been *remembered* and *cursed* to remain consistent with the time span used in the narrative.

Notice also that certain transitional words such as *before*, *At once*, and *Then* in the paragraph help order the events. Below are some transitional words that may be helpful in narrative writing because they indicate time order.

after	before	then
during	finally	when
first	second	later
next	now	meanwhile
simultaneously	at last	at the same time
while	prior to	in the end
at once	eventually	before too long
as soon as	for some time	again

## EXERCISE 7

**Narrative Writing**

**Directions:** Choose one of the following topics to write a narrative.

1. Tell about the events that happened on a day you will never forget.
2. Tell the story of a time when you lost something or found something.
3. Relate an experience from which you learned something.
4. Write out the story of a good movie you have seen.
5. Write a short story in which you are the hero or heroine.

*DESCRIPTIVE WRITING*

Writing that creates a picture in a reader's mind is **descriptive writing**. Good descriptive writing draws not only on what we see, but also on our other senses, describing how something smells, feels, tastes, and sounds. Including specific details in descriptive writing enables a reader to picture what the writer is trying to show.

When you read the paragraph below, why doesn't it seem to be very effective as a description?

The forest seemed very big as we drove through it. It was filled with all different things everywhere. There were various plants and things growing near the sides of the road. We drove slowly along, gazing at everything in our path, wishing we had the time to stop.

This paragraph is too general and too vague. The vocabulary isn't very specific. The writing hasn't supplied enough details to create a picture. To visualize the forest a reader would have to make up his or her own picture, but that might not be the one the writer intended to portray.

Now compare the paragraph below to the one you just read. Notice the differences in the vocabulary. Does the description appeal to more than one of the senses?

The green forest seemed immense as we drove the old, red Chevy through the deserted woods. The woods were filled with tall oaks, graceful beeches, and fragrant pine. Rays of warm sun, welcome in the cool air, caught the leaves of the trees and turned them gold. Purple and white flowers grew in low clusters along the roadside. We heard the crunch of leaves under the tires and the chirping of red-winged blackbirds nearby. Slowly we drove along, gazing in wonder at this evidence of nature's beauty, wishing we had the time to stop.

In the paragraph above details of sight, smell, touch, and sound are described. Did you note the words *red*, *fragrant*, *warm*, and *crunch*, for instance?

**EXERCISE 8**

**Descriptive Writing**

**Directions:** Choose one of the following topics to develop into an effective description. Be sure to add appropriate detail.

1. A shopping mall
2. Your favorite room in your home
3. Someone you know well
4. A toy that you remember
5. The most beautiful view you have ever seen

**Informative Writing**

**Informative writing** is often used to instruct or present facts. The writer's opinion should not be included. A factual story from the newspaper is supposed to be informative. Other common examples of informative writing are recipes and instructions on how to do something.

Informative writing requires clear explanation in order for a reader to follow directions or comprehend the content. Some transitional expressions that help when comparing and contrasting points of information include the following:

<b>TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS</b>	
<b>FOR COMPARISON</b>	<b>FOR CONTRAST</b>
not only, but also	however
in the same way	nevertheless
similarly	on the other hand
just as	while
both	whereas
likewise	still

Read the informative paragraph below. What transitional expressions are used to clarify the comparison and contrast that is made?

A garden may consist of annuals, perennials, or a combination of both. Annuals are plants that only live for one season. Perennials, on the other hand, last for many years. Flowers of annuals stay in bloom for the entire season they live. However, perennials only flower for a short time each year. While annuals require replanting every spring, perennials need division or replanting only after several years. Both annuals and perennials contribute beauty and color in their different ways.

You should have found *on the other hand*, *However*, *While*, *Both*, and *different*.

**EXERCISE 9**

**Informative Writing**

**Directions:** Select one of the topics below to write an informative passage.

1. Explain how to prepare a recipe you have.
2. Explain the process of writing an essay.
3. Explain how the three branches of U.S. Government function (see Social Studies Chapter 3, Civics and Government).
4. Explain how to put gas into a car.
5. Explain the order of operations in math (see Math Chapter 2, page 714).

**PERSUASIVE WRITING**

**Persuasive writing** expresses an opinion. The writer wants to influence the reader to accept the validity of a point of view. A persuasive writer must be able to state an opinion, and then focus on clear, logical reasons that support that opinion. In other words, as a persuasive writer, you must be prepared to tell what you think and why you think that.

**EXERCISE 10**

**Identifying Supporting Reasons**

**Directions:** Read the statements below. Which ones are persuasive? Which ones do not give real reasons to support the statement?

1. People should exercise regularly because exercise is something everybody should be doing.
2. Prolonged exposure to sun should be avoided in order to prevent sunburn and the risk of skin cancer.
3. At the end of October, the clocks are turned back since that is the time of year when we do this.
4. Winter is the most unpopular season of the year because people just don't like it.
5. Summer is very popular because people can participate in more outdoor activities and enjoy the green lushness of nature.

An example of a persuasive paragraph is given below. Notice that the topic sentence states the writer's opinion. The rest of the paragraph attempts to persuade the reader of the validity of that opinion by providing reasons and examples.

Every person in American society today needs to become educated on the use of computers. The widespread introduction of computers during the last two decades has greatly affected American life. The computer has become an integral part of every aspect of society—business, home, community, and even recreation. Some immediate examples of the prevalence of computers are obvious from my own daily life. When I go to work five days a week, I spend several hours working on a computer using information that others have obtained through computers. When I go to the grocery store to buy my family's food, my check has to be cleared through a computer. When I take my car to be repaired, the mechanic hooks it up to a computer. Even when I take a vacation, my plane tickets and reservations are made through a computer. What does this mean? It means that I and others have to keep educated and learn about computers. Thus, we all have to change some of the ways we do things in order to keep up with this change in the world.

Sometimes when you are giving reasons for your opinion, you may be citing the causes or the effects of a situation. Certain transitional expressions help identify those relationships.

**Cause-and-Effect Transitional Expressions**

as a result	because	consequently
therefore	for this reason	if . . . then
thus	hence	for
then	since	

**EXERCISE 11**

**Persuasive Writing**

**Directions:** Choose one of the following topics to write a persuasive paragraph. Be sure to state your position in a clear topic sentence and to provide supporting sentences that give reasons for your opinion.

1. Should the U.S. government take a greater role in controlling businesses and individuals in our society?
2. Is lying always wrong?
3. Does a man need an education more than a woman?
4. Are the rights of one individual more important or less important than the welfare of a whole society?
5. Should every American be guaranteed by law three weeks of paid vacation every year?
6. Has technology made life better or worse for you?

Answers will vary.

**Review of the Writing Process**

- Examine the topic, brainstorm, and write down some ideas.
- State a sentence that gives your main idea on the topic.
- Structure your paper into three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion.
- Add detail, examples, and support in the body.
- You're finished after you read over your work and edit it.



## The Written Product

A look at the product created through this writing process shows an essay organized into three major parts: introduction, body, and conclusion.

### THE INTRODUCTION

An **introduction** to an essay has two main functions. First, it introduces the topic and attempts to interest the reader in the text. Second, and even more important for an essay test, the introduction generally includes a **thesis statement**, a sentence that gives the main idea for the whole essay.

#### Do

Interest the reader  
 Ask a question  
 State a statistic or fact  
 Tell a short story  
 Disagree with accepted wisdom  
 Give a quotation

#### Don't

Apologize  
 Be too general  
 Be too wordy

### STATE A THESIS

A good thesis statement is more than just the topic. Many writers will write about the same topic, yet each writer will have a different approach and different focus on the topic. A thesis statement should be more specific than the topic, and it should provide a focus that the rest of the paper supports.

Look at the example thesis statements given below.

WEAK:            There are several different things I do if I feel stressed out by something.

STRONGER:    In order to cope with stress, I read a good book, talk to a friend, or listen to music.

This thesis statement has been improved by preparing the reader for the content of the paper by identifying the three methods the writer uses. The essay should then explain how each method helps the writer cope with stress

### EXERCISE 12

## Thesis Statements

**Directions:** Read the pairs of statements below. Which one makes the better thesis statement for an essay?

1. (a) In my opinion, I think something should be done to help people get some kind of medical care that they can afford.  
 (b) A universal health care plan is needed in the U.S.
2. (a) The best things in life are not free; they are earned.  
 (b) It isn't true that the best things in life are free.
3. (a) The purpose of this essay is to discuss three major events in my life.  
 (b) Three major events that influenced my life were moving to another state, marrying the one I loved, and becoming a parent.

### THE BODY

The **body** of an essay contains the support for the thesis statement. This is the part where you should be explaining why you think what you do. To develop that explanation well, give examples, cite reasons, retell an experience, or give facts and figures.

#### Do

Include details  
 Give examples, description, reasons you mean  
  
 Keep focused

#### Don't

Assume the reader knows what  
 Keep repeating the opinion that you stated in the introduction  
 Wander off the thesis

EXERCISE 13

**Development and Support for an Essay**

**Directions:** Read the essay that has been started below. Note that the thesis statement is in bold type and prepares for a discussion of three issues. The first issue, *destruction of the environment*, has been developed with reasons and examples for support. Complete the essay by writing two more paragraphs so that each of the remaining two problems stated in the thesis has a paragraph of support.

**Be Happy, But Be Concerned**

Although I generally agree with advice telling us, "Don't worry. Be happy," I do have some concerns about American life today.

**Specifically, the destruction of the environment, the continuing increase of crime, and the lack of affordable medical care for all are problems that we as a country need to address.**

The destruction of our environment continues as we pollute the air, water, and land. Pollution to the atmosphere from car exhaust, manufacturing, and chemical use has caused the death of thousands of plants and animals all over the earth. A well-known example is that of frogs, which are vanishing from the earth. Biologists have suggested that their disappearance may be due to pollution. Furthermore, a study conducted by the United Nations predicted that the threat of global warming brought on from pollution will most likely be even worse than earlier believed. An astounding increase in cases of asthma and allergies has also been linked to environmental pollution. Although we have taken some measures to protect the environment, these are still inadequate, and we need to do more.

The increase in crime is another . . .

Answers will vary.

*THE CONCLUSION*

The **conclusion** for an essay on an exam can be brief. Most important, you want to end the essay so that there is a sense of closure. The writing should not just stop. To close an essay, you could simply restate or emphasize the thesis statement. Other strategies for concluding include calling for some action, giving a quotation, or answering a question that you raised in the introduction.

**Do**

Restate or emphasize your opinion Create a sense of closure

**Don't**

Disagree with what you have already written

Throw in something you have not discussed  
Use *In conclusion*

EXERCISE 14

**Essay Analysis**

**Directions:** Read the essay below. This essay has two major problems. What are they?

Stress is a problem for many of us today. Life is full of lots of changes, and even good change causes stress. When I feel very stressed out, I often go for a walk through the park near my home. Sometimes I just call a friend to talk for a while. A long, hot bath is another way in which I relax.

At other times, I just eat a box of chocolate candy with lots of toffee and chocolate-covered nuts. I might just retreat for a time and sit in the garden to watch birds and butterflies. In the winter that doesn't work, so I might deal with my stress by exercising and working it off. Sometimes I go shopping, and sometimes I go to a movie. Another good way to deal with stress is to listen to music. Just doing nothing is good too.

Stress is not something anyone seeks out, but like it or not, we have to cope with stress as a part of life.

**Example Essay**

Let's look at a sample essay that developed from a topic similar to one that could be used on the EIPCS Final Exam Essay.

Topic: What is one goal that you have? Describe the goal that you identify. Explain why it is important to you.

**EXERCISE 15**

**Developing the Topic**

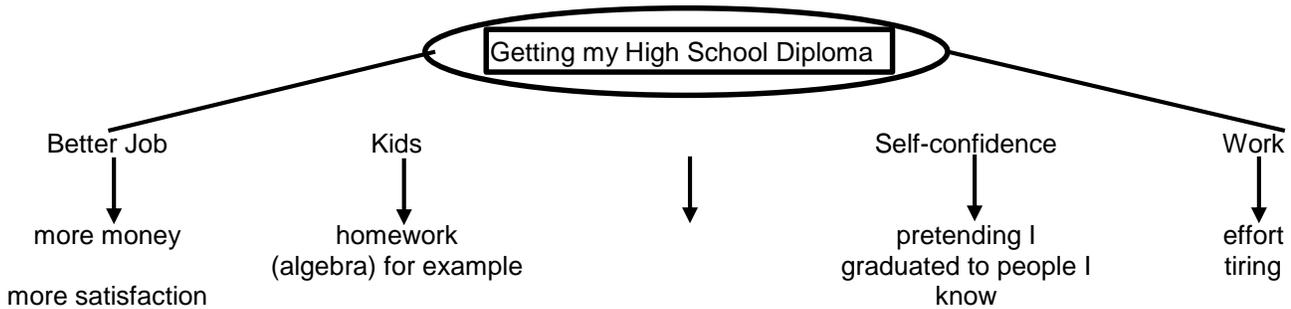
Directions: Think about the topic above and develop ideas by using the seven brainstorming steps presented earlier in *Answers will vary.*

**EXAMPLE OF BRAINSTORMING STEPS**

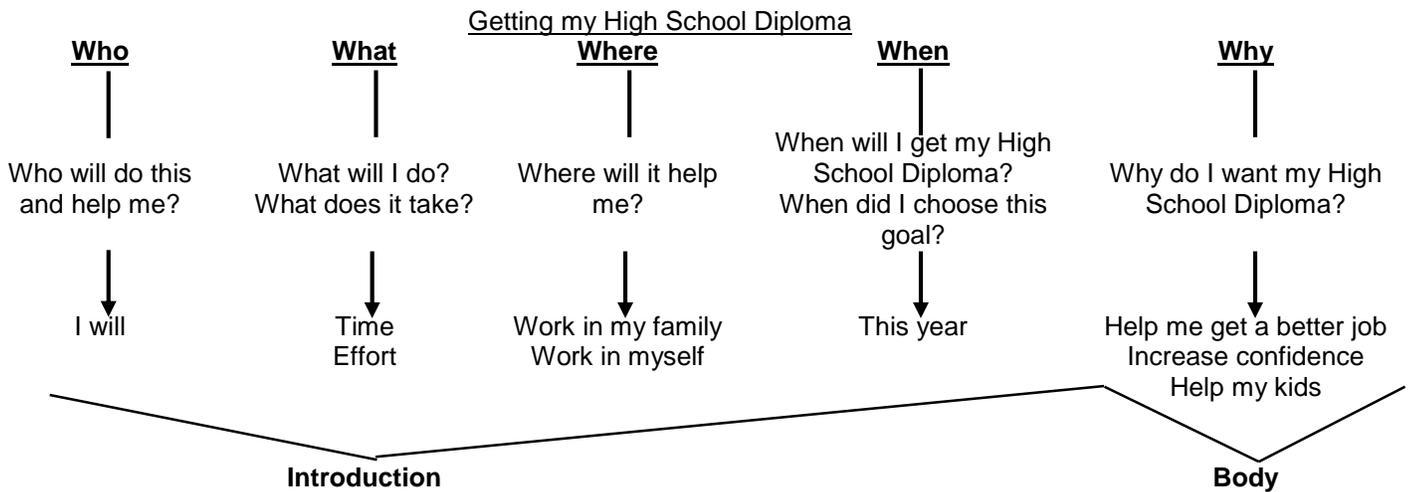
Steps 1, 2, and 3: Adopt an attitude. Consider the topic. List some ideas.

Establishing a healthy living plan      Getting my High School Diploma      Taking a trip to EIPCS in Rockledge, FL

Steps 4 and 5: Make choices. Developing by associating.



Step 6: Use the five W's and organize.



Step 7: Write a main idea sentence (Thesis Statement).

*Getting my High School Diploma from EIPCS is an important goal for me, because I believe it will help me attain a better job, increase my self-confidence, and enable me to help my children.*

**EXERCISE 16**

**Drafting an Essay**

**Directions:** Write an essay on the topic and brainstorming notes you developed in EXERCISE 15

*SAMPLE ESSAY*

**A Goal That Matters**

Looking back now, I can't say exactly when I made my decision. Small wisps of feelings and nagging whispers of thought had been floating through my mind for months. However, one day when I woke up, I had a goal I was ready to work towards. My goal is to get my High School Diploma, so I can get a better job, increase my self-confidence, and help my children.

Note that the thesis statement identifies three reasons for the chosen goal.

With a High School Diploma, my chances of getting a better job improve. Promotion to a better position generally requires more education. Additionally, more and more companies want a high school diploma just as a condition of employment. Since I have no rich relatives and winning a million dollars is extremely unlikely, I'd better do what I can to get a good job.

The first paragraph in the body explains the first reason.

A second reason I want my High School Diploma is that I believe this achievement will help increase my self-confidence. At times, I've lied about having graduated from high school because I haven't wanted to admit that I dropped out. Passing the EIPCS Final Exam and acquiring my High School Diploma will give me a feeling of success. Increasing my knowledge and skills will add to my self-esteem. Success builds confidence, and confidence will help me gain more success.

The second paragraph in the body explains the second reason.

Last, getting my High School Diploma should enable me to help my kids. I want to be able to help them with their homework, so I need to learn more myself. Also, I want them to see that I do believe school is important. By studying and furthering my education, I won't just be someone who says, "Do as I say, not as I do."

The third paragraph in the body develops the third reason stated in the thesis.

For these reasons I wish to get my High School Diploma. Getting my High School Diploma is not just a goal I have. It is also one which I will achieve.  
Steps 4 and 5: Make choices. Develop by associating.

The conclusion restates the main idea of the thesis and calls for action on the part of the writer.

**EXERCISE 17**

**Editing Your Essay**

**Directions:** Read the essay that you have written. Edit it carefully, using the editing checklists from page 7.

**What You Should Know about the EIPCS Test Essay**

*SOME COMMON QUESTIONS*

**1. How much time will I have? How long should the essay be? Tell me the specifics.**

In Part II of the Language Arts, Writing Test, you will be given 45 minutes to write a well-developed essay. Keep in mind that the development of your idea is very important to the quality of your essay. You will be given scratch paper for prewriting and brainstorming as well as two pages of lined paper on which to write your essay. Only the two pages will be scored.

Your paper must be written in ink, and your handwriting is not judged unless it makes your paper illegible. The directions for the essay will remind you to plan, make notes, draft, and edit. You have time to prepare for the final version.

If you complete your essay in less than 45 minutes, you may return to Part I of the Language Arts, Writing Test.

**2. What is the essay topic like?**

You will be asked to write an opinion or explanation on a single topic that you will be given at the test. The topic will be general and appropriate for adults. No specialized knowledge will be necessary in order to write on the topic. The topic will be broad enough to allow for many approaches, and no one will be judging your opinion. Rather, you will be evaluated on how well you have presented the opinion you state.

### 3. How will the essays be scored?

Readers using a process called holistic scoring will read and score your essay on a scale of 1-4. For more information about this scale, see pages 191-192. Each of two readers scores the essay. The scores are then added and divided by 2. To pass the essay test, you must have an essay score that is 2 or higher. If the essay test score is under 2, you must retake the entire Language Arts, Writing Test, no matter what score you may have received on the multiple-choice section.

A reader evaluates an essay on its overall effectiveness rather than by checking for each error. To score well, you should be able plan an essay that effectively supports a focused idea. A paper can contain some errors and still receive a high score. However, the more errors in a paper, the more the reading and comprehension of a reader becomes affected. The greater the interference in the comprehension of a reader, the lower the score will be.

### 4. What are the standards for the scores?

Here are descriptions of essays at each level of the scoring guide.

**Level 4** writing is **effective** because the writer presents a clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt (the topic) while controlling both the language and sentence structure. The response establishes a clear and logical organization and achieves coherent development with specific and relevant details and examples. Word choice is varied and precise, and there is consistent control of Edited American English (EAE), although a few minor errors may be present. As a result of these combined characteristics, the reader understands and easily follows the expression of ideas in the response.

**Level 3** writing is **adequate** because the writer uses the prompt to establish the main idea and generally controls both language and sentence structure. There is an identifiable organizational plan. The writer incorporates specific focused detail, but the development may be uneven. Word choice is appropriate, and the conventions of EAE are generally correct; the errors that are present do not interfere with comprehension. The reader of the 3 response understands the writer's ideas.

**Level 2** writing is **marginal** because the writer addresses the prompt but may lose focus or provide few specific details. The response shows some evidence of an organizational plan and has some development, but it may be limited to a listing, repetitions, or generalizations. There is a narrow range of word choice, sometimes including inappropriate selections, and control of sentence structure or the conventions of EAE may be inconsistent. As a result of these combined characteristics, the reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the expression of ideas.

**Level 1** writing is **inadequate** because the writer has little or no success in establishing and developing a focus, though there may be an attempt to address the prompt. The writer fails to organize ideas or provides little development; the response usually lacks details or examples or presents irrelevant information. There may be minimal, if any, control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE, or word choice may be ineffective and often inappropriate. The reader of the 1 response has difficulty identifying or following the writer's ideas.

*Language Arts, Writing, Part II*  
**Essay Scoring Guide**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>Marginal</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Effective</b>
	<b>Reader has difficulty identifying or following the writer’s ideas</b>	<b>Reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the writer’s ideas</b>	<b>Reader understands writer’s ideas</b>	<b>Reader understands and easily follows the writer’s expression of ideas</b>
Response to the Prompt	Attempts to address prompt but with little or no success in establishing a focus	Addresses the prompt, though the focus may shift	Uses the writing prompt to establish a main idea	Presents a clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt
Organization	Fails to organize ideas	Shows some evidence of an organizational plan	Uses an identifiable organizational plan	Establishes a clear and logical organization
Development and Details	Demonstrates little or no development; usually lacks details or examples or presents irrelevant information	Has some development but lacks specific details; may be limited to a listing, repetitions, or generalizations	Has focused but occasionally uneven development; incorporates some specific detail	Achieves coherent development with specific and relevant details and examples
Conventions of EAE	Exhibits minimal or on control of sentence structure and the conventions of (Edited American English) EAE	Demonstrates inconsistent control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE	Generally controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE	Consistently controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE
Word Choice	Exhibits weak and/or inappropriate words	Exhibits a narrow range of word choice, often including inappropriate selections	Exhibits appropriate word choice	Exhibits varied and precise word choice

**EXERCISE 18**

**Scoring and Evaluating Essays**

**Directions:** Below you will find a topic and four essays that were written on it. The essays come directly from the EIPCS Final Exam. Read each essay and assign a score. Remember that a score of 4 is high and a score of 1 is low. The answers will reveal how the EIPCS program actually scored each paper.

Topic: If you could make one positive change to your daily life, what would that change be? In your essay, identify the change you would make. Explain the reasons for your choice.

**ESSAY A**

If I could make one positive change in my life, I would be a better communicator. I believe that communication affects our world greatly and that all people should make an extra effort to develop our communication skills. The two major communication skills I wish to improve are listening and speaking.

Listening is one of the most important listening skills. If I could be a better listener, I think I would get more accomplished. By not only hearing but listening to people, I would understand their ideas better. If I would be able to listen to others better, I would have fewer misunderstandings.

Speaking is another communication skill I would like to improve. If my speaking skills were more enhanced, I believe that I could make others understand my meaning clearer and faster. Speaking would also help me to deal with any misunderstandings that might come up in my life.

Speaking and listening are two important communication skills; I would like to improve in my daily life. I

feel that these skills would help me to get more accomplished and eliminate many misunderstandings.

In conclusion, I feel that by improving my communication skills I could change my life for the better. By improving my communication skills, I think that I would not just affect my present but my future.

#### ESSAY B

If I could change one thing in my regular daily life it would be to obtain maximum opportunity. By doing this I mean to achieve my highest goals step by step until I have reached the goals set. One obstacle I would like to overcome day-by-day would be to obtain any knowledge, whatsoever it may be, every day; in other words learning something new.

#### ESSAY C

If I could make one positive change in my life, the change would be in my attitude. I would change my attitude toward people and life. My attitude toward certain people I think is outrageous, those certain people are those people who think they're God's gift to the world and I would also change my attitude toward people who are of my age but, act so childlike. I would change my attitude toward these people because in the future I may need some of these people that I've treated so negatively. If I continued to treat these people badly, I may not amount to anything in the future. My attitude toward life would also have to change I think because I'm doing so well at this point in my life. Life I think is just a game that everyone has to play in order to survive. I'm not playing to survive I'm playing only to get by. I feel if my attitude doesn't change at this point, I will never be able to survive the game. The above things about my attitude have to be my positive change in my daily life.

#### ESSAY D

If I could make one positive change in my life it would be to stop being such a procrastinator. I will put things off until when the angels in heaven above start biting their nails! Putting things off until the next day or when I have more time has really become a problem in the past few years. Recently in my senior English class, I turned in my final research paper of my high school career. It looked really good. All of the words were spelled correctly and form was perfect. I expect an A paper. But what few people knew is that I just barely finished that paper, which was assigned two and a half months prior, at 5:30 that morning. I came to school worn-out and grumpy because I had not had any sleep and because as usual I waited until the last minute to work on my paper. The effect of my procrastination was felt all through the day by my teachers and friends who had to suffer through my sour attitude.

The funny thing about my procrastination is that I can't figure out where I could have possibly picked up such a bad habit. My mother and sister always get their work done on time without running themselves ragged and most of my friends start on long term assignments weeks before the due date.

Lately, I have really been bothered by my lack of attention to time because I will start college in the fall. No one will be there to make me get started on my projects. I want to learn before I leave home how to pace myself and how to force myself to make time for long term projects. If I can't learn the basic steps of time management in the next few months, I can't be sure of what the future holds for me. I'm not sure I could handle the stress of last minute work anymore.

Still, I know that any changes in my daily habits must be made by me. I realize that I must begin with the small things, such as cleaning my room on a scheduled basis rather than putting it off until the weekend or an even later date. I believe even that small of a change would help me with my school, church, and community projects.

I know that my life is in my hands and what I make of it depends on how I spend my time. A procrastinator holds himself back and I must move forward. The only way I can do that is to get up and "Just Do It."

### Making the Most of Your Time

One of the steps you should take in preparing for the Essay, on the EIPCS Final Exam, is learning to adapt the writing process to reach the final product. You have practiced all the steps in the writing process before, but you need to apply it to the essay you're writing on the EIPCS Final Exam. Study the following description of how you might approach the essay. Think about how you could adapt this strategy to suit your own writing style.

**Prewrite (5-10 minutes):** Study the topic and think about the choices you have. Write down some ideas, make a choice, and then jot down some notes. Write a main idea sentence to use as a thesis statement. Be sure you have a clear plan of

how your ideas will be organized before you begin drafting your essay. Preparation is key.

**Draft (25-30 minutes):** Neatly write a rough copy of your essay in ink, keeping in mind that you won't have time to recopy the paper. Make the margins wider, so you can go back to add ideas and make corrections. As you write, be sure to refer to the overall organizational plan that you have prepared.

**Revise and edit (5-10 Minutes):** Read over your essay. Look for changes you can make that will improve the writing and clarify the ideas. Check the structure of the sentences, paragraphs, and whole essay. Make sure you have included a clear thesis statement in your introduction and provided some detailed development for your opinion. Correct any problems in grammar, mechanics, or wording.

### Sample Topics for Practice

The best way to study for the essay section of the Language Arts, Writing Test is to practice writing. Here are some essay topics that are similar to ones that may be used on the test. Practice using the skills that you have learned. Time yourself to grow accustomed to writing under a time constraint. Remember that you should spend about 45 minutes on an essay.

1. What do you do to keep healthy? In your essay describe what you do and how it helps you.
2. If anything were possible, what is one wish you would make? Explain the reasons for your choice.
3. Who is someone you admire? Explain the reasons why you admire that person.
4. What should every child be taught? Identify the qualities that you feel are important and give examples of why they are important.
5. What were three major events in your life? Describe each one and explain its significance to you.
6. What makes a good parent? Support your opinion with specific examples and reasons.
7. What are three qualities that you value in a friend? Be specific and use examples to support your views.
8. What is one way in which life has become better today, and what is one way in which life has become worse? Explain your opinion with specific examples.
9. What can be done to help with the problem of road rage? Give suggestions and examples that support your opinion.
10. If you could have any three jobs during your lifetime, what three jobs would you want? Explain why you would want each one.